

POSSIBLE ABORIGINAL SITE NEAR DONGARA

By MARK DE GRAAF, Hale School, Wembley Downs.

In January 1968 Stan Gratte, poultry farmer of Wonthella, and I visited the property of Mr. Sydney Finlay to investigate a site which could be of Aboriginal origin. Mr. Finlay's farm is situated on the western bank of the Irwin River, about four miles downstream from the Pell Bridge on the Great Northern Highway. At this point the river valley is a few miles wide, bordered by the low remnants of the Victoria Plateau.

The site is about one quarter of a mile west of the homestead, on a low hill from which extensive views to the north and east may be had. The Irwin River, the river valley, the opposite side of the Victoria Plateau and the southern sections of the fertile flats between Dongara and Geraldton, can be seen from this strategic point. Narrow gullies are on either side of the small hill, which itself forms part of the old plateau, through which the Irwin has cut its course. The river (and thus the nearest water supply) is about 500 yards distance from this point.

The "stone arrangement" consists of two circles of stones. The circles are not concentric, they touch each other on the south-east side, that is, the side facing toward the homestead. This point is very close to the edge of the hill.

The outer ring measures about 20 feet in diameter. It is made up of about 50 individual rocks of irregular shape. The rocks are from five to ten inches across. It is thought that they are of weathered, brittle sandstone. The rocks are grey in colour and do not appear to have been worked by human hand.

The smaller ring, made up of similar rocks, is about six feet across. The two rings are quite obvious among the grass, at least during our visit. It may be different in winter.

The rocks which make up the two rings are thought to be indigenous to the area. A small outcrop of similar rock appears just where the two rings touch. It may be that the hill (and therefore the plateau in this vicinity) is capped with this type of sandstone.

A superficial inspection of the area immediately around the rings did not yield any additional information. No stone tools or remnants of other stone rings or lines could be seen. It appears that the area immediately to the west of the rings, that is on the wider part of the hill, was once a clearing, now becoming overgrown with saplings.

There is no certainty that this is in fact an Aboriginal site. But there is some evidence to suggest that it is so. It appears that the rocks are placed by human hand but not by Europeans, adults or children. The design is quite consistent with other Aboriginal stone arrangements I know of. They mostly display a combination of lines, rings and heaps, often associated with a waterhole or a natural rock formation. The location offers commanding views over a wide area, but at the same time affords adequate privacy, so necessary for a sacred place. The distance from water is sufficient to avoid interference between possible camps and the proximity of a sacred site. Aboriginal parties gathering food and hunting along the river would have no cause to go up the narrow gully. Women and children camped near the river would be far enough to avoid them seeing or hearing anything that occurred at the site, yet the participants in the ceremony would have had easy access to water and camp. Both in appearance and location the site appears to be of Aboriginal origin.

Aboriginal stone arrangements are usually related to increase ceremonies, carried out to procreate animal and plant (food) species or even human beings. Increase rituals are still held in the more remote parts of the state, particularly where the Aborigines are still in their own territory. The ceremonies are conducted by the senior male members of the group under conditions of great secrecy. In some areas (e.g. the Western Desert) these ceremonies do not only involve chanting (perhaps in the clearing) and dancing, but also bloodletting (usually from the subincisions of the participants), sometimes leading to washing the hair in blood or covering the stone or stones with blood.

There is of course not enough evidence to state that this was so in the case of the possible site described. Stan Gratte, who has been working for some time now on sites in the Geraldton-Murehison area, hopes to obtain more reliable information eventually.

The number of Aboriginal sites recorded in the south-west division of the state is rather small compared to other areas of Western Australia. It is through the alertness and interest of farmers like Mr. Finlay that information comes to hand from time to time. We would like to express our appreciation to Mr. Finlay for his cooperation and hospitality. The site has been reported to the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, which is currently engaged in indexing all known Aboriginal sites in Australia, and the Western Australian Museum.

A BIRD LIST FROM THE DRYANDRA FOREST

By R. JOB

During 1967 and 1968 visits were paid to the Dryandra Forest and the adjacent Congelin water reserve, a little over a hundred miles from Perth. The Dryandra in the main consists of open woodland where the wandoo (*Eucalyptus redunca*) is the dominant tree. The undergrowth is dominated by species of *Dryandra*, particularly *D. nobilis*, while the sandplain poison (*Gastrolobium microcarpum*) occasionally forms dense stands. At Congelin dam the woodland is more open, with very little sandplain poison.

In 1967 forty-two days or parts of days were spent in the area, from March 4 to December 17. The number of days spent there per month was as follows:— March, 4; April, 3; May, 1; June, 6; July, 2; August, 4; September, 5; October, 7; November, 4; December, 6.

Visits in 1968 were, unfortunately, much less frequent, twenty days in all being spent in the area, divided as follows:—January, 3; February, 4; March, 4; April, 4; May, 2; September, 1; October, 2.

The following is a check-list of the birds encountered on these visits. This does not claim to be all inclusive, and is unsatisfactory in at least two respects. Notable absentees are the nocturnal birds, with the exception of the Boobook Owl; at least one other species of owl was heard within the forest quite regularly, but unfortunately this bird was never seen. Furthermore, as a European ornithologist new to Australia, I only recorded definite sightings where the identity of the bird was not in doubt, until such time as I learnt to identify the bird by song alone. Thus records could give a misleading impression of the scarcity of some unobtrusive species.

All records are of birds within the Dryandra or Congelin areas except at one point where a dam in a wheat field lay